
At the Intersection of Guns and Mental Health

~a primer~

by Jake Wiskerchen

(some dude from Sparks)

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An Innovative and Philanthropic Mental Health Practice



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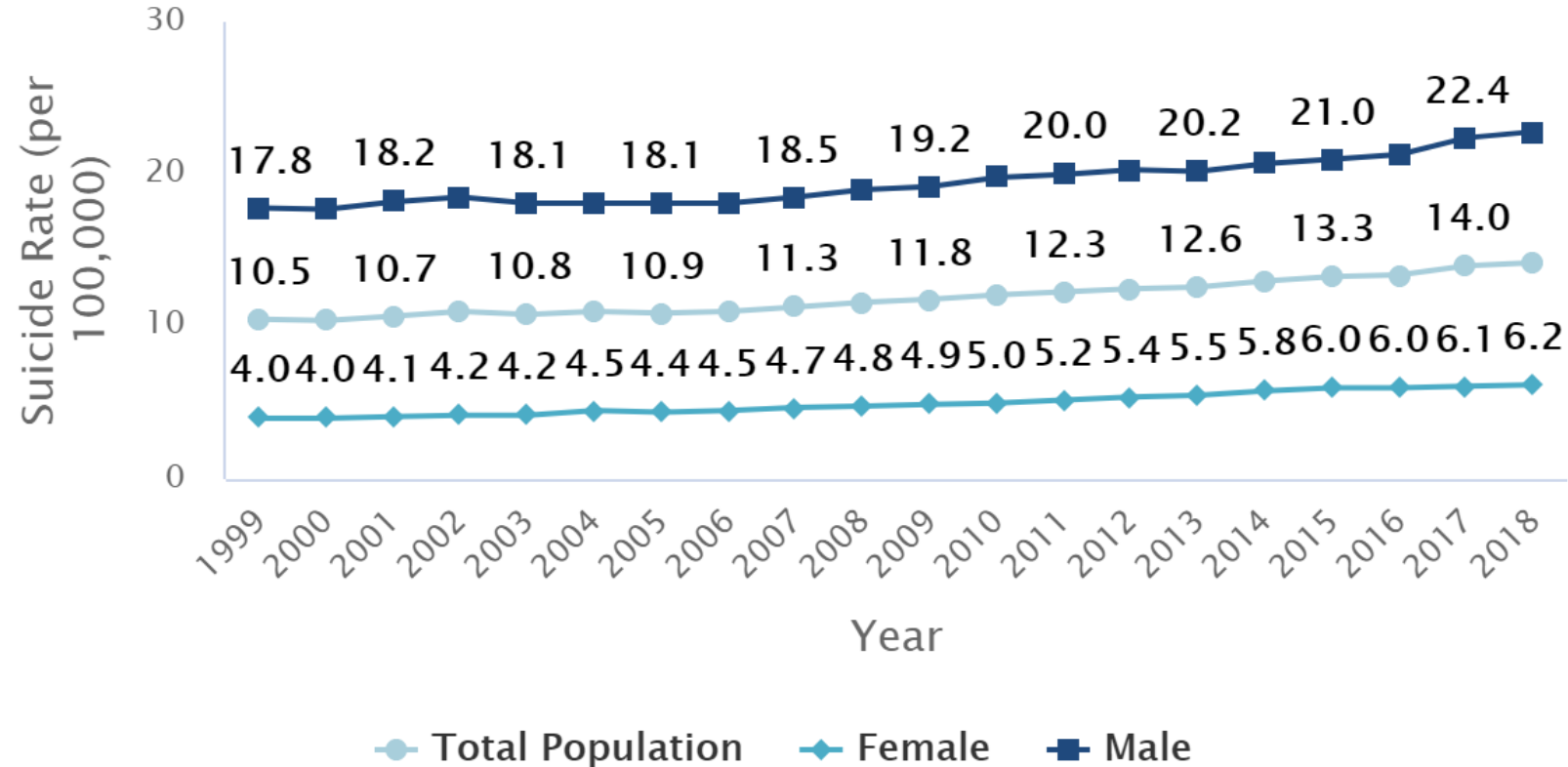
Scenario:

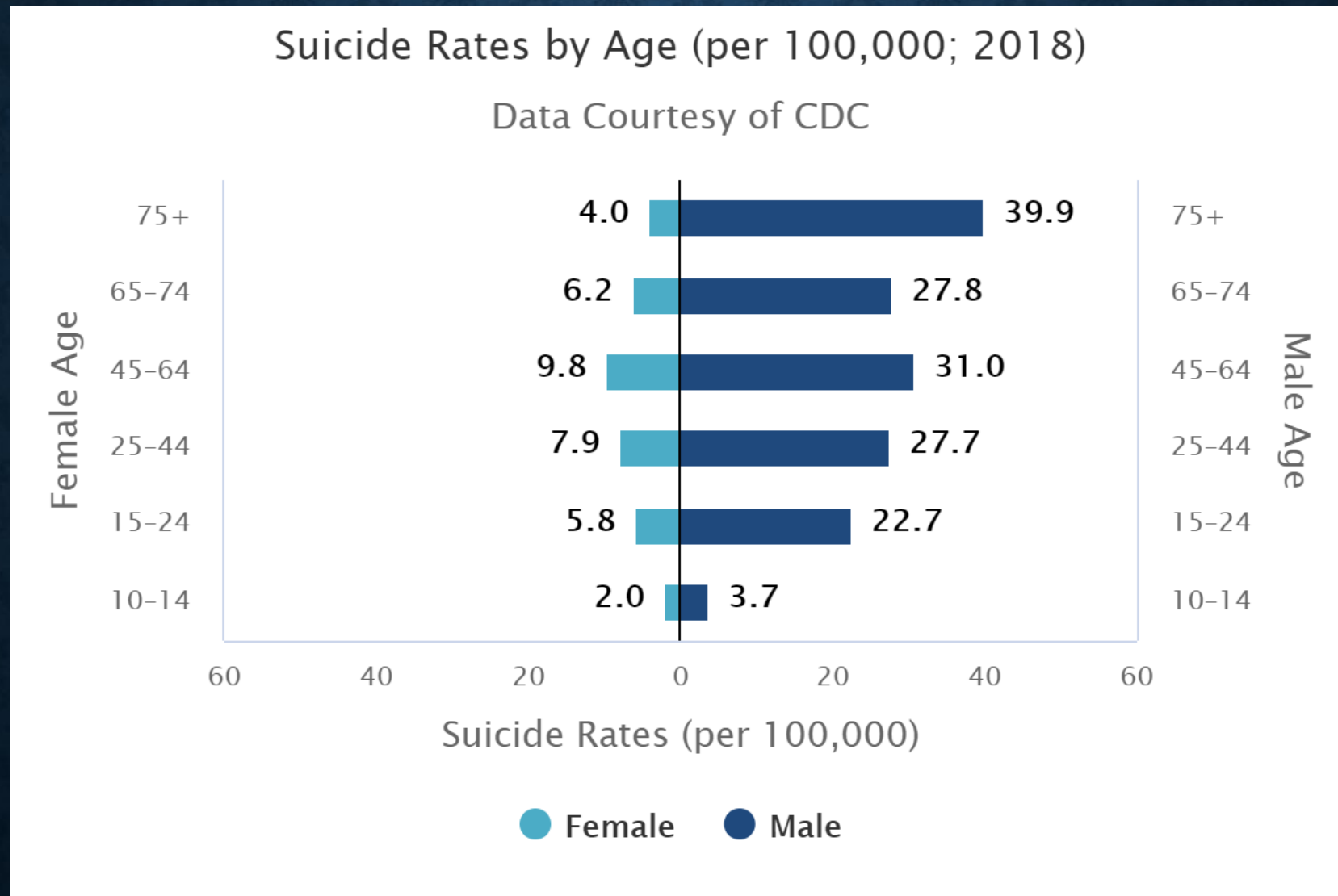
You have a young person in front of you ideating suicide. Do you know what to do?

But first...some statistics!

Age-Adjusted Suicide Rates in the United States (1999–2018)

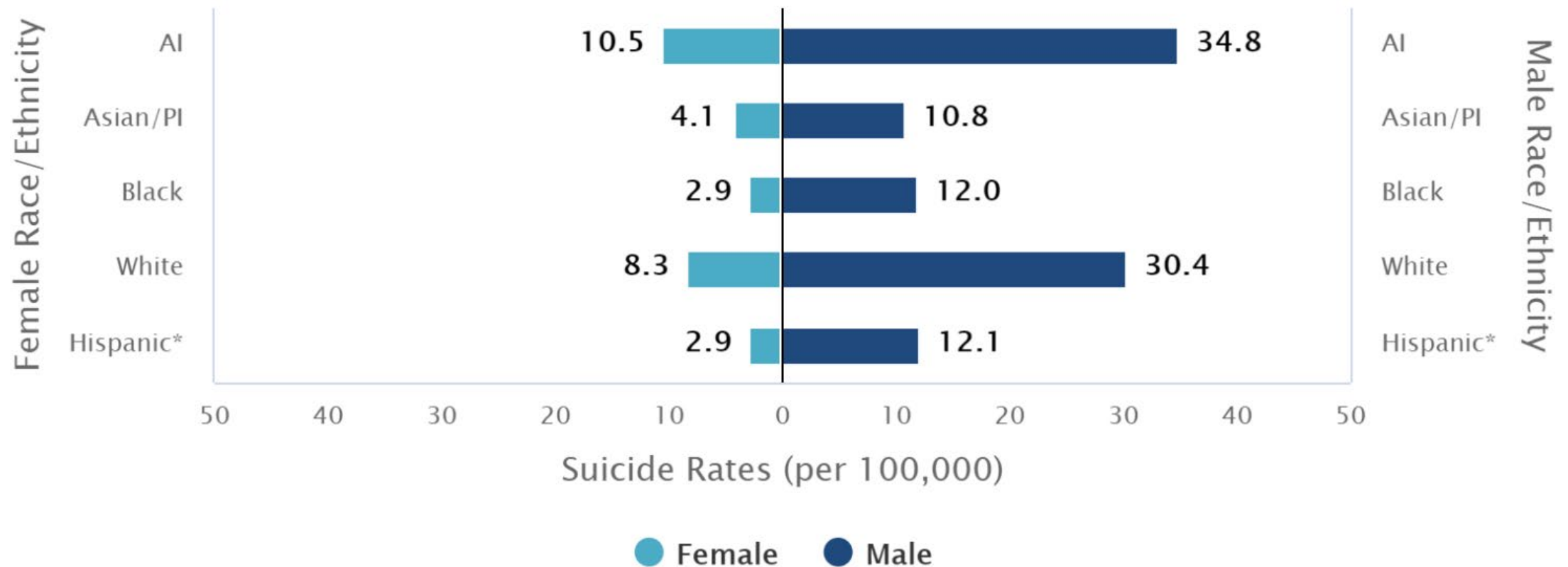
Data Courtesy of CDC





Suicide Rates by Race (per 100,000; 2018)

Data Courtesy of CDC



*Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race; all other racial/ethnic groups are non-Hispanic
AI = American Indian, PI = Pacific Islander

Most likely to die by suicide

Who dies most frequently?

- Men
- Native American men
- White men
- Ages 45-64 and 75+
- LGBTQ teens - 50% of males and 29% of females; 41% of trans adults had attempted in past year*

*UCLA study - 2015

Back to our suicidal youth...

Basics of suicide/crisis intervention

(for those who are new and those who need a refresher)

- Plan
- Means
- Access to the means
- Desire (scaled)

YOUR JOB IS NOT TO FIX THE PERSON IN CRISIS

YOUR JOB IS TO RETURN THE PERSON TO PRE-CRISIS STATE

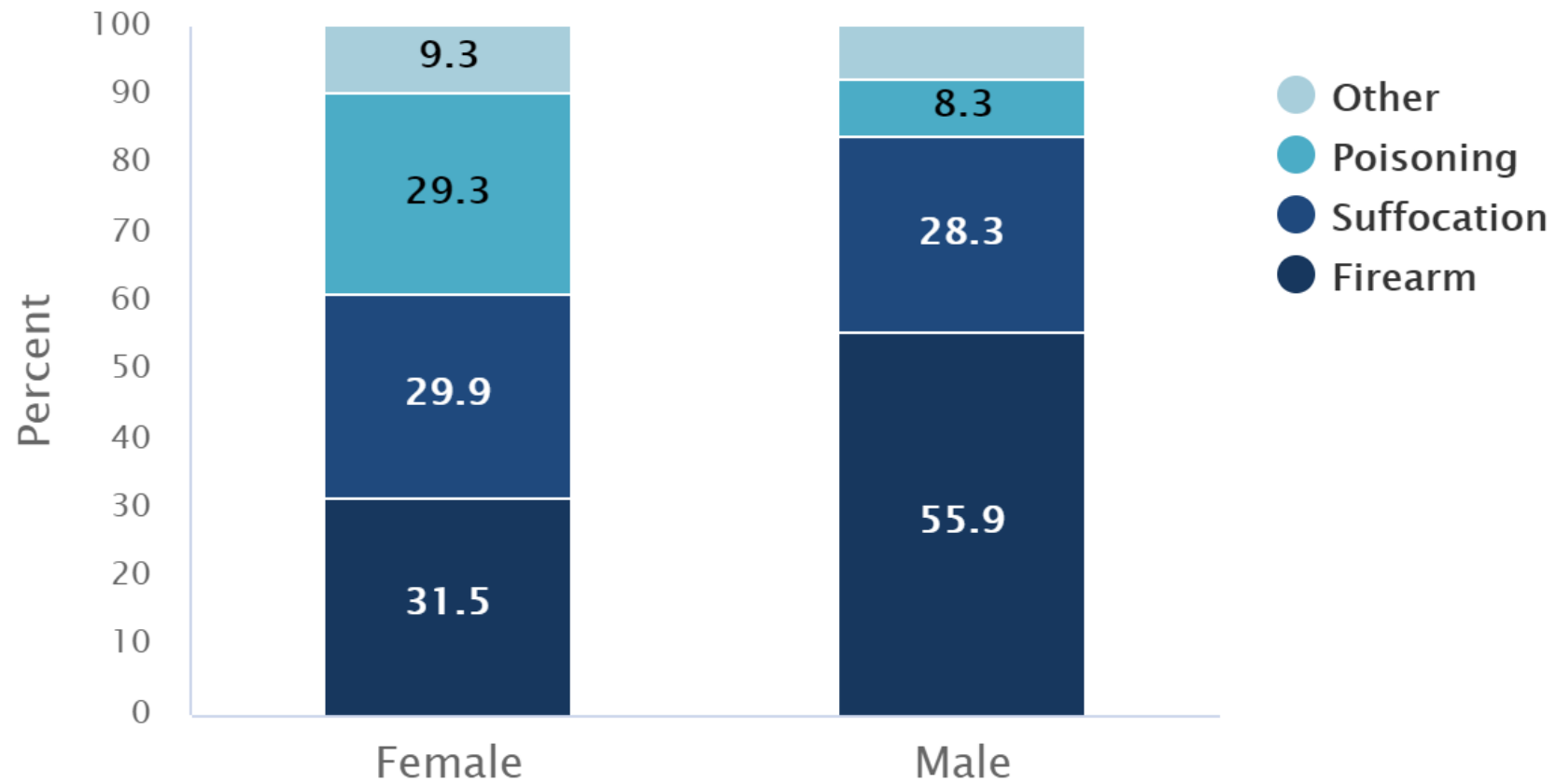
What are some common methods of suicide?

Most popular?

Most lethal?

Percentage of Suicide Deaths by Method in the United States (2018)

Data Courtesy of CDC

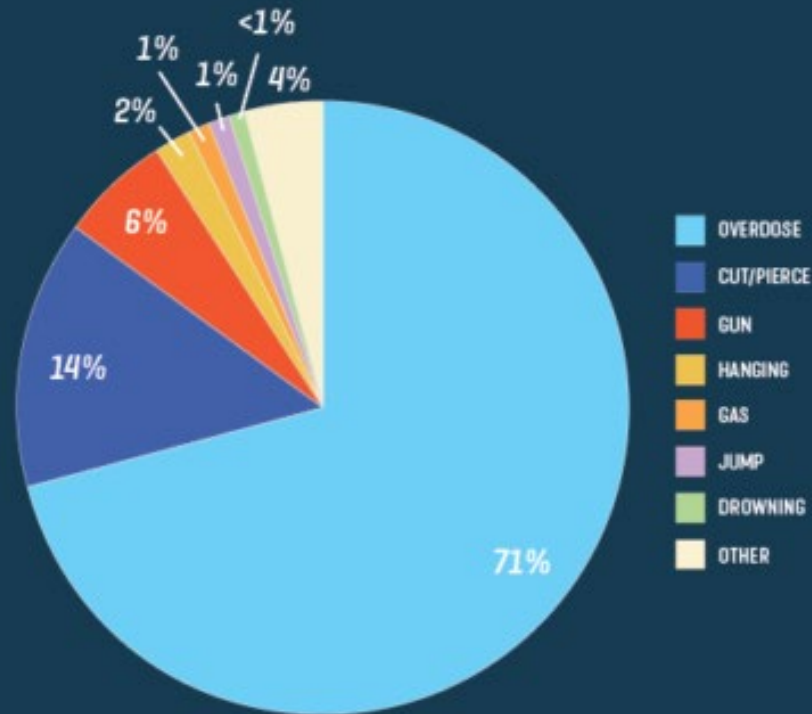


Most Suicide Deaths are from Guns

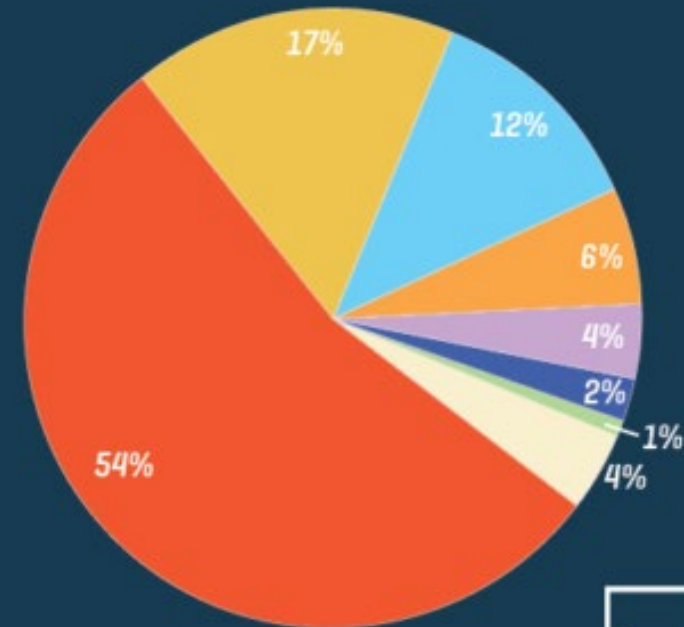
**GUNS AREN'T THE MOST COMMON WAY TO ATTEMPT SUICIDE.
BUT THEY ARE THE MOST FATAL.**

Firearms account for more suicide deaths than every other means combined.

PERCENTAGE OF ALL SUICIDE ATTEMPTS



PERCENTAGE OF ALL FATAL SUICIDE ATTEMPTS



SOURCE: American Journal of Public Health



WHO?

WHAT?

WHEN?

WHERE?

WHY?

HOW?

How do states compare?

Suicide in States with the Highest and Lowest Gun Ownership Levels, 2000-2002

	High-Gun States *	Low-Gun States **
Population	39 Million	40 Million
% Of Adults With A Gun At Home	47%	15%
Male		
Firearm Suicide	8,489	2,430
Non-Firearm Suicide	3,572	4,007
Total Suicide	12,061	6,437
Female		
Firearm Suicide	1,260	176
Non-Firearm Suicide	1,488	1,439
Total Suicide	2,748	1,615

*WY, SD, AK, WV, MT, AR, MS, IO, ND, AL, KY, WI, LA, TN, UT

** HI, MA, RI, NJ, CT, NY

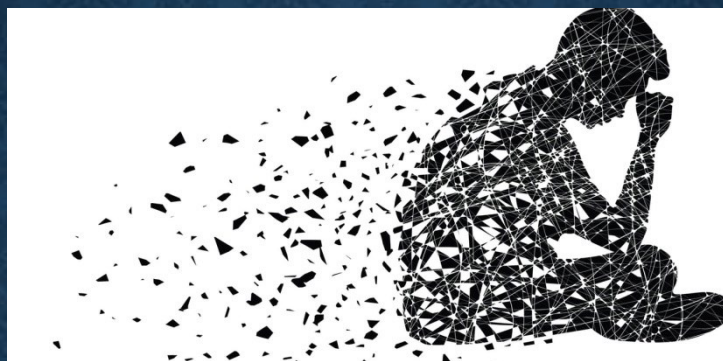
Estimated 5 million* new gun owners from March to August in 2020, per NSSF.

Are these people storing safely?

Are they trained?

We don't have a magic wand. We have to meet this issue where it is, not where we wish it *could* be, believe it *should* be, or how it is elsewhere.

*Estimates are between 7 and 12 million for all of 2020



The link between gun deaths and
mental illness is through suicide.

Most Firearm Deaths are Suicides

59: People who died in the Route 91 shooting (including the shooter):



58: People who die by firearm suicide each day:



There is a Positive Relationship Between Access to Guns and Suicide Deaths

Anything that delays the ability of a suicidal person to have access to a firearm can protect them against suicide.

This doesn't mean that gun ownership has to be restricted, just access at times of risk.

#CauseAPause



But would you talk about firearms?

Because the alcohol industry not only talks about drunk driving, they started the designated driver program.

Because 1/3 of American homes have a firearm and ~50% of people live in one - this topic is more important than ever before.

1/3 of the gun shop owners contacted for the guns shop project knew someone who had died by an impulsive suicide purchase

“Most gun groups have a culture around firearm safety, around protecting the family, so extending that to suicide prevention can be a natural fit.”

- Cathy Barber, Means Matter

I will talk about firearms!



**94% of Americans
think suicide is
preventable**

afsp.org
actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org

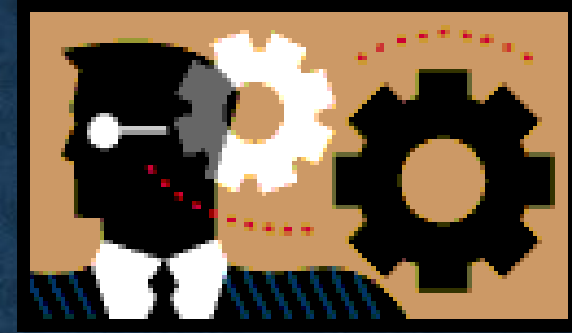
NATIONAL
ACTION
ALLIANCE
FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION



Screening Promotes Recovery

People who screen regularly are:

- More attuned to their symptoms;
- More knowledgeable about their conditions;
- Better able to communicate with their provider;
- Able to recognize improvement early in treatment;
- More aware of the warning signs of relapse;
- Better able to self-manage their illness.



MHA Screening: More Than 4 Million Completed

Depression (PHQ-9)

Anxiety (GAD-7)

Bipolar (MDQ)

PTSD (PC-PTSD)

Youth Screen (PSC-YR)

Parent Screen (PSC)

Alcohol and Substance
Use Screen (CAGE-
AID)

Psychosis Screen
(Ultra-High Risk) (PQ-B)

Eating Disorders

Results Overview

More than 4 million screens taken

Depression Screen is most popular (43%) Bipolar (16%); Anxiety (14%); Psychosis (15%);

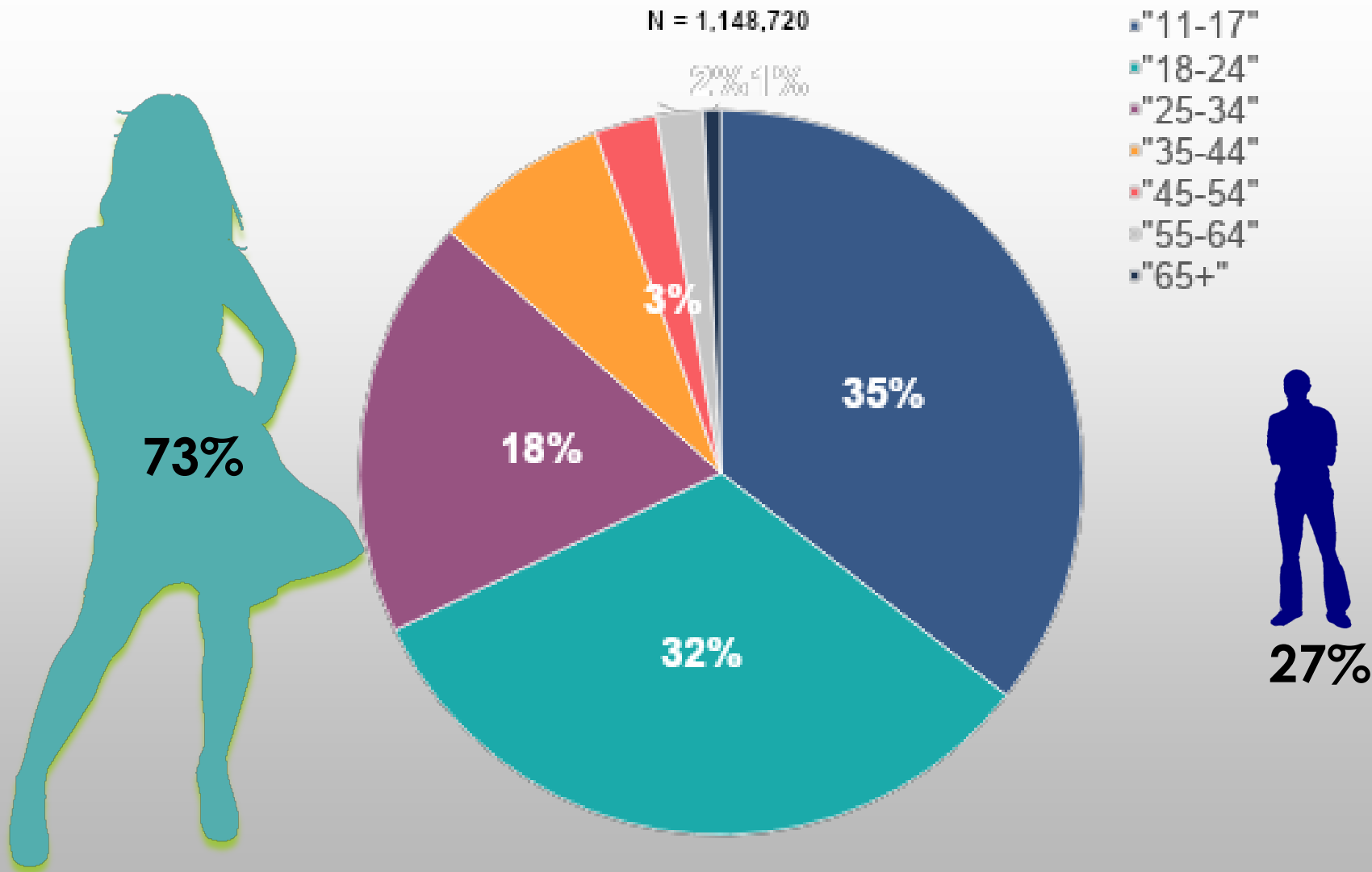
8% international (30% Europe, 20% Canada, 6% Australia)

Race/Ethnicity - close to Census

35% are 11-17; 32% 18-24.

31% report chronic pain, 13% lung problems, 12% diabetes.

Screeners are Young



Mental Health and the Firearms Community



Together we're working to reduce suicide



 Zephyr Wellness

An Innovative and Philanthropic Mental Health Practice

Walk the Talk America Mission Statement

Through formal education, outreach, and engagement with the mental health and firearms communities, Walk the Talk America aspires to reduce firearm suicides and other negative incidents associated with firearms ownership.

JOINING TWO CULTURES

Given the significant proportion of our society that is associated with firearms in some way and the frequency with which issues in this area are discussed, it seems rather self-evident that mental health professionals need education and training in this area. We recently set forth the following recommendations in this regard (Pirelli & Witt, 2017)

- 1. All mental health professionals should develop their cultural competence by familiarizing themselves with the literature pertaining to firearms, which should extend well beyond the gun violence literature and into the full range of firearm-related matters, prosocial and otherwise.**

WTTA
WALK THE TALK AMERICA

Law Enforcement Suicide

LOD deaths vs. suicides

- 2016: 143/174
- 2017: 172/171
- 2018: 174/158
- 2019: 228/132
- 2020 (through August): 125/205
 - 114 LOD deaths are from covid-19

Military Suicide

Veterans

- 1.5x the rate of non-vets when adjusting for population differences in age and sex
- 70.7% males w/firearm and 43.2% of females w/firearm
- “22 a day”
 - Closer to 18...but who's really counting...
- President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) had WTTA founder Mike Sodini involved in a panel at the WH
- Rep. Lauren Underwood's legislation with WTTA endorsement

UNDERSTANDING GUNS

Firearms 101

- Basic types of guns
 - pistol
 - rifle
 - shotgun
- Basic types of ammo
 - centerfire
 - rimfire
- Basic mechanics

UNDERSTANDING GUN CULTURE

Beliefs

- Individual rights
- Individual responsibilities
- Acknowledgment of legitimacy

UNDERSTANDING GUN CULTURE

Behaviors

- Control
- Preparation
- Defense

UNDERSTANDING GUN CULTURE

Activities

- Collecting
- Recreational shooting
- Hunting
- Defense

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Medical model

- Diagnosis
- Treatment plan
- Recovery

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Theory and practice

- Nature
- Nurture
- Systemic thinking
- Family of origin

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Types of illness

- Addiction
 - Chemical (substance use/abuse)
 - Process (habits)
- Mood disorders
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Bipolar
- Thought Disorders
- Personality Disorders

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Treatment Course

- Time limited
 - Prior authorizations, treatment plan (problem, goal, objectives to goal)
- Recovery happens
 - When goals are met, treatment ends
- Treatment in perpetuity is unusual/unethical
 - Fidelity to client and payor
 - Client IS payor...autonomy/non-maleficence issues
 - Justice - are we doing the right thing?
 - Beneficence - are we continuing to “help?”

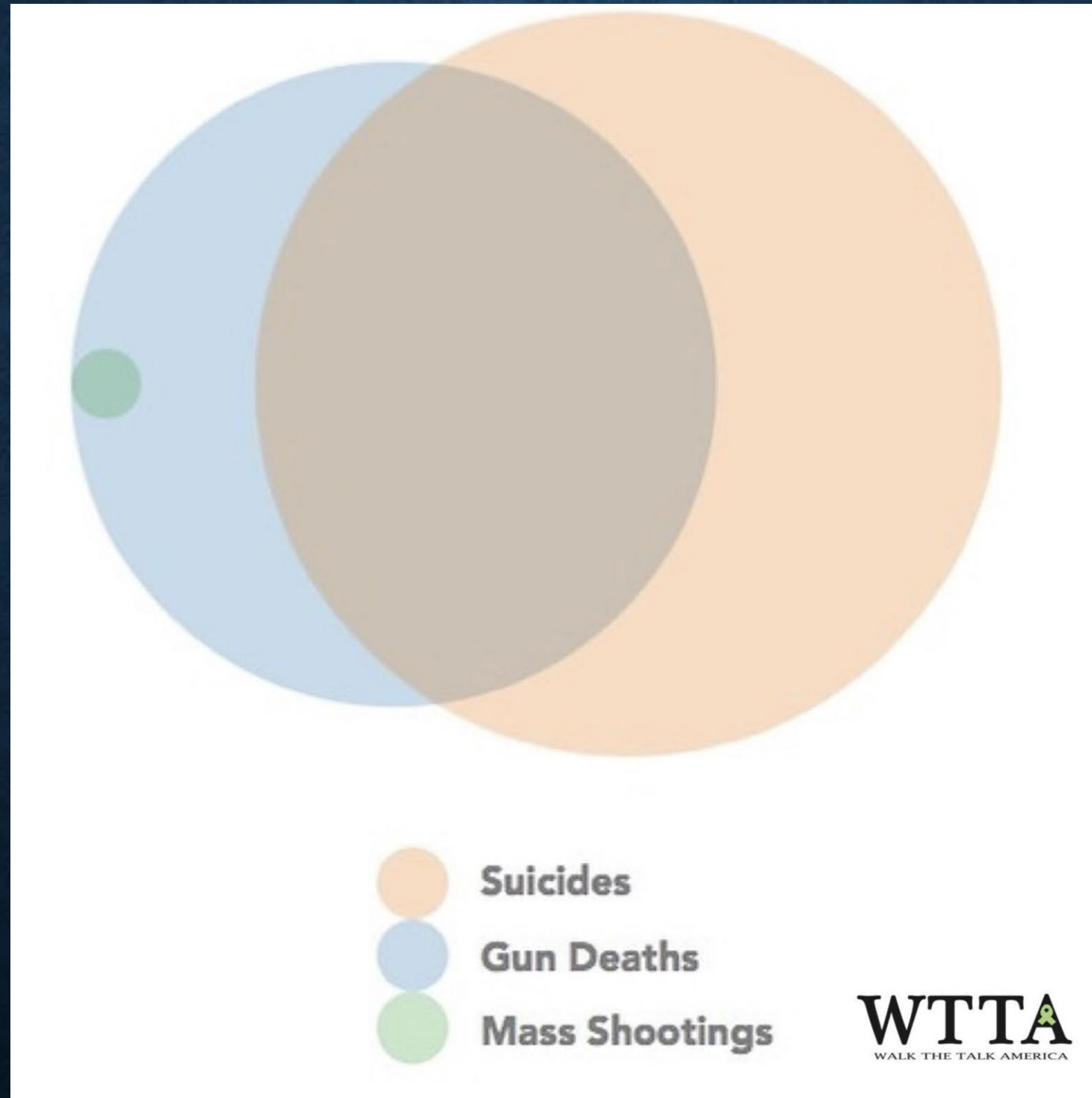
Safe Storage/Alternatives

Back to our suicidal kid (with a gun...)

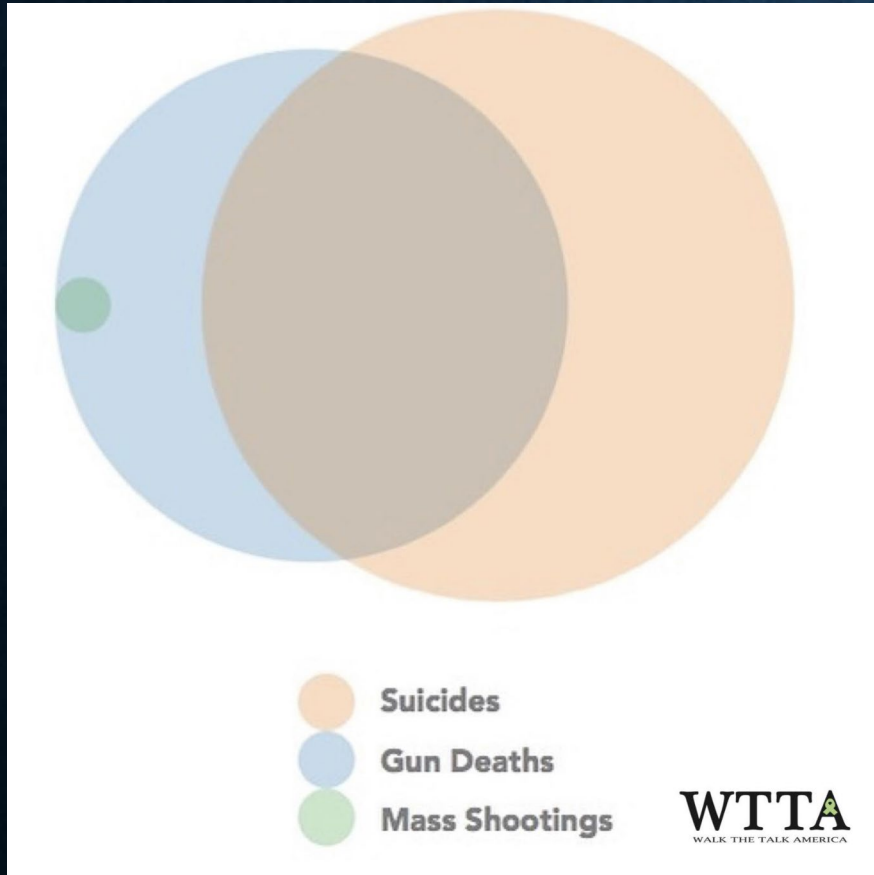
How well do you know firearms?

1. Treat every gun as if it's loaded
2. Keep your finger off the trigger and out of the trigger guard until you plan to shoot.
3. Never point a gun at anything you don't intend to destroy
4. Know your target and what is beyond it

The myth about mass shootings



The myth about mass shootings



- ❖ All firearm deaths: 39,740
- ❖ All suicides: 48,344
- ❖ Firearm homicides: 13,958
(35.1% of firearm deaths)
- ❖ Firearm suicides: 24,432
(50.5% of suicides, 61.4% of firearm deaths)
- ❖ Negligent/undetermined: 1,350
(3.3% of firearm deaths)
- ❖ **Mass shootings: 80**
(.2% of firearm deaths)

Red Flag Laws

NRS 33.500 through 33.670

33.560 Filing of verified application for ex parte or extended order: Persons who may file verified application; grounds; contents; service. [Effective January 1, 2020.]

1. A law enforcement officer who has probable cause to believe that a person poses a risk of causing personal injury to himself or herself or another person by possessing or having under his or her custody or control or by purchasing or otherwise acquiring any firearm may file a verified application for an ex parte or extended order.

2. A family or household member who reasonably believes that a person poses a risk of causing personal injury to himself or herself or another person by possessing or having under his or her custody or control or by purchasing or otherwise acquiring any firearm may file a verified application for an ex parte or extended order.

→ *sections 3 and 4 are procedural* ←

(Added to NRS by 2019, 4172, effective January 1, 2020)

Red Flag Laws

NRS 33.500 through 33.670

NRS 33.570 Requirements for issuance of ex parte order; availability of court; court to inform applicant and adverse party upon transfer of information to Central Repository. [Effective January 1, 2020.]

1. The court shall issue an ex parte order if the court finds by a **preponderance of the evidence from facts shown by a verified application** filed pursuant to NRS 33.560:

(a) That a person poses an imminent risk of causing personal injury to himself or herself or another person by possessing or having under his or her custody or control or by purchasing or otherwise acquiring any firearm;

(b) The person engaged in high-risk behavior; and

(c) Less restrictive options have been exhausted or are not effective.

2. The court may require the person who filed the verified application or the adverse party, or both, to appear before the court before determining whether to issue an ex parte order.

3. **An ex parte order may be issued with or without notice to the adverse party.**

Red Flag Laws

NRS 33.500 through 33.670

NRS 33.640 Expiration, dissolution and renewal of order. [Effective January 1, 2020.]

1. An ex parte order expires within such time, not to exceed 7 days, as the court fixes. If a verified application for an extended order is filed within the period of an ex parte order or at the same time as an application for an ex parte order pursuant to NRS 33.560, the ex parte order remains in effect until the hearing on the extended order is held.

2. An extended order expires within such time, not to exceed 1 year, as the court fixes.

3. The family or household member or law enforcement officer who filed the verified application or the adverse party may request in writing to appear and move for the dissolution of an ex parte or extended order. Upon a finding by **clear and convincing evidence** that the adverse party no longer poses a risk of causing personal injury to himself or herself or another person by possessing or having under his or her custody or control or by purchasing or otherwise acquiring any firearm, the court shall dissolve the order. If the court finds that all parties agree to dissolve the order, the court shall dissolve the order upon a finding of good cause.

4. Not less than 3 months before the expiration of an extended order and upon petition by a family or household member or law enforcement officer, the court may, after notice and a hearing, renew an extended order upon a finding by clear and convincing evidence. Such an order expires within a period, not to exceed 1 year, as the court fixes.

Transfer Laws

NRS 202.2544 through 202.2549

NRS 202.2545 Legislative declaration. [Effective January 2, 2020.] The Legislature representing the People of the State of Nevada hereby finds and declares that:

1. To promote public safety, federal law currently prohibits felons, domestic abusers, **the severely mentally ill and other dangerous people** from buying or possessing firearms;

Transfer Laws

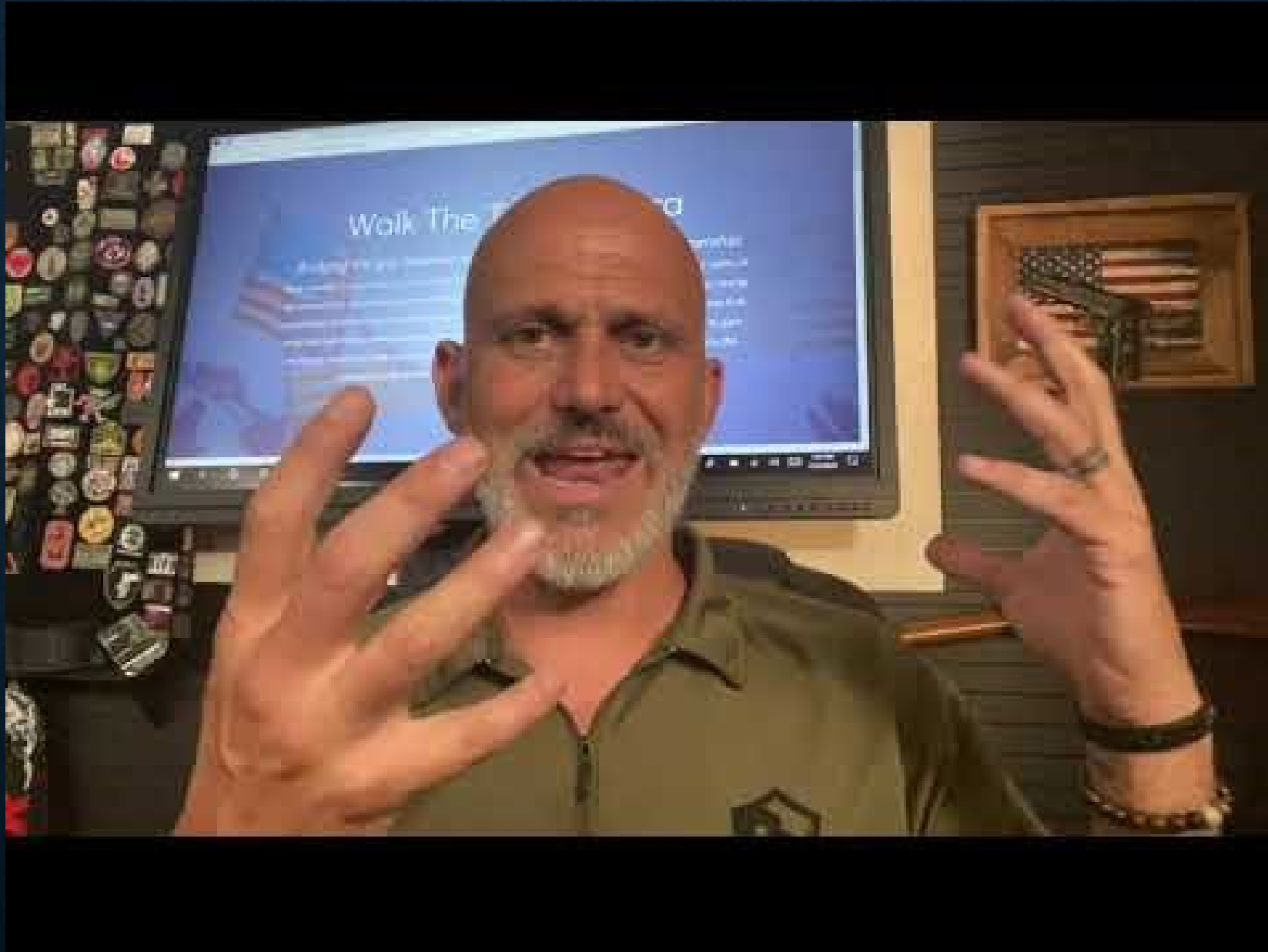
NRS 202.2544 through 202.2549

NRS 202.2545

3. **Criminals and other dangerous people** can avoid background checks by buying guns from unlicensed firearms sellers, whom they can easily meet online or at gun shows and who are not legally required to run background checks before selling or transferring firearms;

6. We have the right to bear arms, but with rights come responsibilities, including the responsibility to **keep guns out of the hands of convicted felons and domestic abusers**;

Safe Storage/Alternatives



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